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ABSTRACT

Sensations of burnout have a great deal to do with societal issues and the way that society defines the self concept of individuals. When people do not feel as societal values dictate, they often begin to sense disappointment in themselves, their life styles, and what they are receiving from people around them in the form of approval, praise, or friendship. Six elements are identified that may be used by teachers to analyze their feelings about their life and work and to determine what areas in their lives are offering satisfaction or disappointment: (1) daily energy, which must be sustained to remain constructively functional in work and to achieve satisfaction from it; (2) self-fulfillment, received in and from work; (3) perfection syndrome, which concerns the all-or-nothing sense of achievement; (4) society's (or an institution's) standards, as shown through rewards received or withheld; (5) impressions of competence of performance in work and performance in relationships encountered in nonwork situations; and (6) sense of self-direction and functioning effectively on the job. These elements are discussed as they pertain to the job of teaching and the role of teachers in society. Suggestions are also made for dealing with areas in work and relationships outside of work that are causing symptoms of burnout. (JD)

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Sociological Approaches to Issues on Teacher Burnout

Introduction

While it is a psychological phenomenon that individuals recognize a sensation of "burnout" in themselves, that they feel emotionally depleted and without energy or reserves of it, it is nevertheless clearly a sociological one. The individual receives in a certain era at a certain time in history ideas from sources that are external to the body, and that represent a trend of the times of a society.

Sensations of burnout have a great deal to do with societal issues and the way that society defines the self-concept to individuals. Literature that is prevalent, songs that are popular, and newspaper or magazine articles that receive national attention as well as the television moderators who are interviewing people who are authorities in their field provide information for the lay public that tells them how they should be feeling. To the extent that people do not feel as society says they should, relative to optimal levels of satisfaction, they begin to sense disappointment in themselves, their life styles, and what they are receiving from people around them in the form of approval, praise, or friendship.

Burnout refers to a sense of exhaustion, depletion, and as though all reserve margins of energy have been used in order to live, to express one's self, or to help others. Emotional and/or physical burnout (or the feeling of being depleted and empty) relates to disappointment, that one has not received something that

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was anticipated by the individual. It relates to disappointment in one's own performance, in one's own decision-making, disappointment in others, or the disappointment that what one expected as a prize (be is psychological or financial) for the energies expended by the individual was not forthcoming.

Idealistic orientations of satisfaction for giving of one's self in service to others may fall short or the goals expected from self-sacrifice in some way, of one's time, one's energies, or one's giving up of potential higher salaries in order to be of service to others who may be less fortunate than one's self, financially, psychologically, or academically.

Professional services can often be designated to lower levels of salaries in a society. Individuals are told that to be self-sacrificing is to somehow give attributes of goodness to one's character or personality. When unions come along to negotiate salaries of teachers, for example, in the same way that industry negotiates for products assembled by workers, it is slightly out of character for the teacher who has been taught to think of the profession as worthy because of its service and a sense of mission to help humanity rather than to puruse it as a job for the money it can bring in return for one's exact efforts.

This confusion of roles, one of service to humanity, another as an individual who performs a twenty-four hour work role, never stopping to think about one's role as a helpmate or teacher, compared to the individual who performs an eight-hour a day job, not having to think of what one did upon going home and who does not have to plan

for the children's work for the next day, the next few weeks, and months in order to help them progress in their work, can lead to disappointment and confusion and the tendency to listen to what mass communication urges by insisting that one is not happy and should not consider one's self as being fulfilled unless he or she is achieving full satisfaction at all times.

The typology that follows exemplifies the various elements of issues that are involved in burnout problems. Whether or not the individual is able to identify satisfactions obtained in one's job can be traced to some of the elements defined in the typology. A profile may be traced and pinpointed to match the situation of any individual who is concerned about job satisfaction and energies that go into the performance of that job.

The individual's feelings about a particular element can be perceived in terms of strength of that feeling or the frequency with which an individual feels a certain way in relation to a specified element in the typology. It is anticipated that the individual may find himself or herself in the position of realizing whether certain feelings are somewhat normal or may be characterized at extreme ends. Depending on how strong the individual may judge himself or herself to be at a given position for a certain element, it may be relatively easy to do something about that element and thereby change feelings of burnout to feelings of self-propulsion or self-energizing sctivity.

Typology on Issues Related to

Teacher Burnout

Element Identified	Individual Feelings		
	Low	Medium	High
I. Daily energy which must be sustained for one to remain constructively functional in one's work or to want to achieve satisfaction from it			
II. Self-fulfillment received in and from one's work			
III. Perfection syndrome functions or over-rules regarding the all-or-nothing sense of achievement			
IV. Society's (or a given institution's) standards as shown through rewards received by the individual (or withheld from him or her) over-rules the self-concept			
V. Blurred impressions exist between competence of performance in one's work and performance in relationships encountered in nonwork situations			
VI. Sense of self-direction functions effectively in one's job			

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Reviewing one's feelings or performance in relation to the typology, one may examine each element and place one's self on the emotional feeling line of low, medium, to high in relation to how one perceives one's self on each element. Plotting a profile, one can see where one is in relation to various qualities related to one's job and in that sense, begin to analyze separately where some of the conflicts may lie.

The first one refers to the daily energy which must be sustained to remain in or to achieve satisfaction in one's job affects one of the most crucial aspects of the burnout issue. Whether one feels as though he or she is under stress most of the time when giving that energy or whether one feels as though a sense of renewal is achieved through one's work makes the difference between feeling depleted or satisfied with one's job. It also requires energy when one is bored with the routines of a job, whether the job is too simple, nonchallenging to the individual resulting in active energy loss on the job. Energy is required to sustain interest, motivation, and the desire to perform well in one's job. When one is bored or not receiving the satisfaction one had expected, it requires energy beyond satisfaction that will be attained in return for that energy output. This influences feelings of burnout.

The second element, the degree to which one has a sense of self-fulfillment from one's job affects whether the individual will not feel burned out or emotionally and physically depleted. Self-fulfillment sustains pleasure in one's job, transmits feelings of pleasure so that energies are not dissipated. Fulfillment functions to bring more energy, not less, despite energies that were expended in eventual satisfaction with one's work.

The third element that affects feelings of burnout relates to the perfection syndrome which educators learn in their university or college preparation courses for teaching or for administrative jobs. Teachers are taught to feel that they should be bringing all 35 children in a class up to their maximum potentials of learning abilities. It is a challenge to bring only ourselves up to our maximum potential of learning, let alone 35 separate pupils who may or may not have the desire to fulfill someone else's goals. However, just because we may not easily or realistically be able to bring each student up to the highest potential of development each day, it does not mean that we totally abandon the idea. It means that if we are not all things to all people at all times, that we not consider ourselves total failures. Gains for certain pupils must be appreciated in relation to the teacher's instructions. Each day cannot bring 100 per cent success for every individual in the class, much as we would wish this to be true.

Teachers have learned to feel guilty and to feel totally unsuccessful if they were not able to bring every child to the point of high maximal levels of learning skills every day. This erodes their efforts to continue trying. If one considers one's self a total failure one day and does not learn to consider one's efforts in terms of groups of successes for some but perhaps not for all pupils on any given day, a teacher will begin the erosive process of burnout. Emotional draining begins as the teacher becomes excessively self-critical or unrealistic about what can be done to help every single child every single day. Runaway idealism can be misleading. It can mislead the teacher in terms of recognizing the appropriate or significant feedback symbols regarding his or her own competence and artistry in teaching.

The fourth element is related to society's or a given institution's standards as shown through the rewards received by individuals. If individuals learn to regard themselves as worthy or not in relation to the size of the salary or size of meritorious "prizes," or other psychological or tangible rewards given as evidence of appreciation of one's services or showing how much one is valued or is highly thought of, the individual is misled.

A salary that does not compare well with someone else's can often be construed as that yardstick to measure one's worth as an individual. This can be a detriment in that when monies are given, they do not always reflect the intention of the employer or administrator giving it. Less money does not mean that the individual is not a good teacher.

Contemporary society has led thinking in the direction that more money means the individual should accordingly respect himself or herself more than those who do not receive high salaries. This scale of measurement for salaries is usually derived from mysterious sources of a company and relate to values other than one's worth.

The fifth element which is a crucial influence in bringing about the feeling of burnout, is the frequency with which people blur their impressions of self-concept and their judgment of performance in one's job and the performance (which should be differentiated) in relationships encountered in nonwork situations. Many professional people try to use the same criteria and logic and objectivity they use in applying judgment of a self-concept in the professional or scientific role and apply it to their interpersonal relationships. The logic or honesty mode that has to be used in the context of professional situations and in one's job when doing the work one needs in serving a client is different from the behavior that must occur between two people who care about each other and want each other's trust and love or nurturing.

The coldness of logic and objectivity required in scientific studies are not elements that should be used in personal relationships. Often the business man who uses firm leadership skills that may be effective on the job may use the same qualities in interpersonal relationships and may wonder why it does not produce pleasant responses from others in the nonwork situation.

The scientist or researcher cannot use the same so-called "cool" logic in a human relationship that he or she uses in examining a product. It is misleading to many people in the professions who transfer to their personal life the qualities and characteristics and probing incisive skills needed in order to perform effectively in one's job related to critical analyses and order. A product which needs to be judged carefully is different from a human relationship which cannot endure cross-examination and critical, logical measuring processes, which are typically appropriate in scientific pursuits.

Honesty, and a search for truth in science has different goals from that of honesty of feelings of two human beings. The tendencies to measure, to see how one rates in terms of certain standards often pollutes a relationship.

Blurring the lines of impressions on how one is faring, whether one considers himself or herself as doing well in one area, work, for example, but not being able to use the same characteristics or skills in human relationships can affect the individual who will subsequently seek more tasks in the work situation. Those tasks are those in which he or she is more comfortable or certain of in regard to the behavioral characteristics needed. This individual may avoid interpersonal nonwork relationships that do not involve him or her in work.

A sense of self-direction in one's work is the sixth element that needs to be considered in the issue of burnout. If one does not feel an impetus or a drive that seems to be on the upgrade, rather than on a plateau, a feeling of spinning wheels may result. Individuals need to experience a sense of progress. When they can succeed in something or some task, they need to continue to do better in it or to tackle something different. People need to feel that they are conquering their environment, or else they feel like robots acting on someone else's command even though they themselves may have created certain so-called "binding" routines for themselves.

The sense of challenge and the sense of knowing what one is capable of doing is like an elixer that provides the lift of pride in one's competence. Sameness, same level, or very little movement observed by the individual does not give the lift that one needs in regard to the self-concept. Work represents competence, service to others, and the message that one's skills are worthy and a contribution to an organization. When that idea seems to be true no longer, it saps one's energies, leading to feelings of disappointment in the self, in others, and in life's opportunities.

Burnout in one's job is a phenomenon that is in part a result of emotional depletion of feeling that the amount of energy given in one's work has not brought back the commensurate rewards, whether the rewards are in the form of money, prizes, of esteem or prestige that is given the individual in his or her work. Burnout is in part a result of the fact that the society of the 1970s has indicated that people should be enjoying a certain quality of life, promising implicitly that the individual will always feel happy if the individual does certain things, or thinks in certain ways.

This 24-hour-a-day promise of happiness or feelings of self-fulfillment is not reasonably possible. One can feel relatively happy, self-satisfied, and somewhat content with one's life, but not every hour in a 24 hour day. Knowing one's job well for many years can in part be an effect of routines that the individual has acquired or created in his or her job. Routines can be depleting, boring, and nonchallenging once they become a habit, or almost automatically performed with minimal brain activity.

Contemporary society brings new ideas, different focus or positions on various professions and on the way one should be conducting his or her life. To the extent that one feels, after introspection or examination of one's life, that it is not satisfying in several ways, an individual becomes grim, too self-analytical and dissatisfied generally with his or her own conditions in life.

In the individual who senses burnout is a sameness of work patterns, requiring minimal challenge and a minimal level of participation in activities that the individual enjoys other than allowing time mainly for one's work. The person senses dissatisfaction with his or her job because of the feeling, too, of not measuring up in some way with newer standards as well as feelings of not knowing how to heighten one's spirits in daily job performance.

When one begins to feel like an automaton, or not appreciated sufficiently, or not as challenged by the job as might have been true at one time, the individual feels humorless, sees very little that is redeeming about society, about life and about people in general. The future seems to hold minimal satisfactions. The tendency to even think creatively and in constructively novel ways seems to be absent. The energy is not there to permit it.

Society has changed in its attitudes in regard to what individual fulfillment is supposed to be and people are extremely confused. Does this method for individual fulfillment that society holds out there as a prize which all must attain mean that an individual is supposed to have fulfillment 24 hours each day, and every day? Who is doing this for the individual? What part does the individual's inner mechanisms for balancing out this fulfillment have to play? Has he or she <u>been</u> <u>taught</u> any place in contemporary society to understand how to balance out an awareness of self-fulfillment in component parts?

An issue facing people today is that there are more scales than have ever been made available to people before in the history of the world that are expected to be used in order to evaluate one's

self, not only for one's performance on a job or in a profession giving service to others, but also for one's behavior as a human being performing in relationships with others when they are not in a work-related situation.

Facing assessment in one's work life, where one is paid for high performance and excellence in some cases, and also facing measurement in one's personal relationships which have taken on counting and objectivity as though personal lives could be faced or regarded as a science, has people on stage on at all times, even when they are not with others and alone at which time they may be giving themselves a rating on their own behavior in isolation. Self-measurement is a challenge. It has become more and more analytical, more and more frequent, more and more recommended as needed or essential, so that nothing is left for pure enjoyment. Everything has a measurement of good or bad, high or low.

Human gauges are fine to apply, but up to a certain point. Trying to measure up to someone's standards as well as one's own leads toward a glut of measurement devices that few human beings could endure favorably.

It makes sense to measure people's performances in a job. Skills and competencies have to be improved. People have to learn of the best ways to work with children and of the best ways to help them know where they need strengthening of skills. Somewhere in an individual's life, however, he or she needs to be enjoyed without constant

standards or measurements as guidelines for self-regard.

Concluding Thoughts

If it is possible to determine some of the singular qualities or elements that affect feelings of burnout, loss of energy on one's job and self-disappointment in several ways, it may be possible or reasonable to assume that certain elements may be constructively strengthened. If an individual can identify certain areas in which one may sense appropriate levels of optimism and confidence in one's abilities to follow through on one's uplifting goals, it may be reasonable to expect that energies can be re-activated.

In relation to cognitive aspects of one's job one may seek to acquire greater depth in a segment of one's field. One may try to specialize in newer ideas in relation to one's field. Sharpening one's skills in statistics, research design, reading and reporting on research may be of interest and of concern to a professional individual who wants to pursue further work in a given area. Renewed commitment to something that is related to one's field can bring greater expertise to one's cluster of skills. It can lead to a more challenging job. This can be done in a temporary sense or for longer periods of time.

Interests, reading, and inquiry into certain new areas can bring the individual into contact with different people. The change of direction can open the mind toward new receptiveness of ideas and subject matter.

One must settle for levels of accomplishment rather than an all or nothing standard of pursuit. The length of time that is needed to pursue an idea to extreme and detailed ends can contribute to a dissipation of energy and loss of interest. This would have to be a personal decision judged in relation to one's own expectations of what the end result or product would have to look like or be.

One may wish to obtain a study grant in a related field. Various study centers are seeking people of competence who can discuss the moral and philosophical issues of contemporary society in light of the technological advance made by medicine and fields of genetics.

Cognitive orientations must be re-directed in order to obtain self-satisfaction and the appropriate balance of challenge that individuals in professional areas enjoy pursuing. Some like to pursue endeavors in the arts and bring these new ideas to the classroom for children. In this sense, the teacher and the pupils are seeking together. The children sense the teacher's enthusiasm, a quality which cannot be masked or presented fraudulently. Children recognize authentic enthusiasm. Sincere interest in one's subject matter spills over into the spark of enthusiasm that children catch easily.

Acquiring greater depth in one's area of interest or one related to it can lead to the active involvement of intellectual pursuits. It can contribute to an improved self-concept and to something that touches on authentic interests at any given time in one's life. This authenticity

provides a type of integrity and a sense of well-being that strips away feelings of burnout. It activates one's energies and goal-setting behavior that lifts one from boredom. It also has a built-in self-directing sensing system. When an individual can receive self-direction and become one's own resource reservoir, it allows him or her a rigor in decision-making that might otherwise be absent. It allows one's goals to be clearer in perspective. It also provides some ideas for the implementation of those goals.

Besides being involved in the intellectual pursuits toward greater or related depth-study in one's field, an individual has to perceive a separateness between interpersonal relationships with the qualities that are desirable for enjoyment in them and differences in the professional role-behaviors that are required for scientific objectivity and logic. The qualities and standards for measurements used to determine one's self-appraisal and satisfaction or performance in the professional role should not be blurred with the measurement and self-appraisal elements that should be used for interpersonal relationships in the nonwork role. Having standards for one's own behavior particularly in relation to a sense of personal values can be a guiding force for an individual. If one permits everyone else to add their values to the individual's, and tries to adapt to everyone else's sense or standards of values, it can become very confusing in the process of trying to be all things to all people at all times. One has to have his or her own central guiding impetus for behavior.

Individuals who are excessively ambitious and trying to measure up to their own standards as well as those of each of their acquaintances or professional colleagues become overly serious and grim as well as excessively defensive if someone says something meant to be humorous. Individuals who are trying too hard to be something that has confused them in terms of exactly what the rules of the game or the goals are, become very grim and have low levels of a sense of humor. They are quick to take offense when something harmless is said. They are very introspective and unaware of events or people in the environment which can be enjoyed.

A loss of a sense of humor or taking one's self very seriously can distort what is heard and what is perceived in one's environment. The balance of lightness against seriousness can be lost and sacrificed much to the detriment of the individual who most needs emotional support from others at a given time.

Thus some awareness of having a sense of perspective or a sense of balance between what one pursues and what one realizes is not a permanent and irrevocable error of judgment must be developed. The sense of balance between what one will settle for at a given time as satisfying has to be cultivated. With the information of contemporary society stressing self fulfillment and the professional role pulling in the direction of service to others as well as the perfection syndrome and being all things to all people at all times, one needs to sensitize one's awareness of balance and perspective relative to levels of self-satisfaction with one's choices, one's behavior, one's levels of achievement, and one's levels of energies expended for certain periods of time.

In summary, it appears vital that individuals know how to re-direct their energies, their intellectual pursuits, and the sense of balance between self-satisfaction and the perfection syndrome to perform services to others at highest levels of performance at all times, in all places, and for all individuals. The professional individual must be able to identify resourcefulness within himself or herself and be cautious not to allow the institution of one's workplace to become the standard bearer of one's personality. It is a matter of being aware of which is which. It is also a matter of being aware that one is derogating one's self in relation to the salary one receives, and often the determination of that salary is not made on the basis of one's worth.

Professional people must know how to rescue themselves from blurred vision which allows them to confuse professional role behaviors of exactitude with interpersonal nonwork role behaviors which often need emotional support or caring or loving. Guidelines or standards and measurement for so-called appropriate behavior in the work role should not automatically be transferred to personal roles, however successful the work role behaviors seem to be.

Last, professional people must be able to determine certain value orientations that will permit them to be somewhat happy with choices that they make even though they may wish to shift or realign their views and perspectives periodically.

Epilogue

Having described some perceptions of the phenomenon of burnout in teaching and the ways that the experience may relate to other aspects of one's life, it seems necessary to add comments on ways to deal with it. The individual must not allow the feelings of helplessness or exhaustion or depletion to become extended. This does not mean that one can set out to find energy in order to proceed in one's job or to act effectively in an experience. Energy flows out of another set of experiences prior to its becoming involved in a directly oriented event.

Experiences which bring satisfaction or pleasure to an individual are those that provide even temporary feelings of satisfaction, an enjoyable event, a situation in which one discovers one's own skills which provide pleasure or help to another person, a situation in which one performed a task well and also one in which the individual discovers a new aspect of one's personality and which provides pleasure or pride in the self.

The kind of experiences which bring pleasure or satisfaction to an individual and one in which extreme tension is not present permits the individual to be free to consider new ideas, to think of different tasks and even new goals or more difficult goals than an individual might have considered prior to the experience. The release of constraints that operate when one is tense for an excessive period of time can become the arena for broader functioning of ideas. The openness and space provided by a less tensely focused and limited perspective can become the source of energy release. It can become the fulcrum that moves to a better position on the idea dimension.

Energy can emerge as a result of enthusiasm for an idea, taking pleasure in commitment to a goal or set of goals, accepting a challenge for one's self that one considers important or significant in some way, anticipating an interesting relationship with someone in business or in personal contexts, knowing what to do or having clarity of vision in relation to the pursuit or achievement of certain goals, and anticipation of an unusual experience associated with pleasure or satisfaction. The locus of energy which provides an individual with the skills, the capacity for enjoyment and satisfaction must come prior to performance in one's job as well as in part, the direct performance or interaction with clients in one's job.

Success in one's profession comes not only with feelings of pride in one's work performance which cannot come unless an individual is not constantly measuring the self in perfectionistic terms, however vague, rigid or demanding those terms may be perceived, but comes also as a result of regeneration of ideas novelty, anticipation and academic replenishment. Novel approaches, changes in routine or organization of tasks in one's job, a willingness to perceive things in a different way at various times in one's career or self-questioning, have to be used in most professions if one is to advance and help others in an effective manner. Self-satisfaction has to occur simultaneously with being of service to others in one's professional routines.

If an individual is not able to obtain the time to be physically away from one's usual routines, one must obtain psychological change and regeneration which can result from acquiring new perspectives, new knowledge, and attitudes that were not present earlier in one's job. New attitudes can come from reading greater varieties of books beyond one's immediate focus of concentration on a job. New ideas can flow from attending events or going places that represent new interests for the individual. Self-awareness of various facets of one's

personality comes from reaching out to the environment toward a broad range of space and topics and linking parts of them to the self. This new extension of the self to people, places and events has an expanding effect in a psychological sense. This kind of expansion can disclose new interests, new skills, and result in an increased self-satisfaction with one's behavior in a job or profession.

Among the most satisfying of all the results are those that provide a new image of the self as well as pride in the fact that one has not only found satisfactory courses of behavior toward the resolution of a conflict, but also that one has "played the game" within the rules of society. It is growth-producing to the individual to learn that one is able to maneuver one's self out of problems and to greater or higher or broader sources of interest so that one's life becomes more stimulating and more self-satisfying in legitimately recognized terms. One may find, as an example, a promotion in one's profession, may find a different direction within one's job, or in general may discover greater pride in one's own way of viewing the world and the way one relates to it.